

# IF I MARRY OUTSIDE MY RELIGION

BY ALGERNON D. BLACK

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# IF I MARRY OUTSIDE MY RELIGION

BY ALGERNON D. BLACK

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NOTHING IS MORE DEEPLY imbedded in American tradition than the right of a person to choose his mate freely without outside interference. Yet young people often find that the exercise of this right raises difficult problems, particularly if they happen to fall in love with persons with different religious backgrounds from their own. To make matters worse, they often get conflicting advice.

Some friends say:

"Don't marry out of your church or religious group or you'll regret it the rest of your life. Religion goes deep. You can't compromise it."

But others insist:

"Religious differences don't matter. Man and woman differ in many ways. It makes marriage interesting. You have to adjust. It isn't always easy. But love finds a way."

Should young people of different religions marry? How difficult is it to achieve contentment, happiness, and mutual satisfaction when partners enter marriage with different childhood religious experiences and beliefs? The problem has become a real one for increasing numbers of young men and women.

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Every marriage brings together persons from different families, ranks, classes, and other diverse traditional and cultural backgrounds. "Intermarriage" becomes a problem only when some element of difference is seriously disturbing to the marriage partners or to the groups to which they belong.

Before we consider the problem let us take a look at the marriage of one couple of different religious backgrounds.

Sally, a devout Roman Catholic girl, meets Jim, a less devout Lutheran young man. They have about the same levels of intelligence and education. Their home backgrounds are similar in many respects but different in others. But the main difference is in their religion. Jim does not want to become a Roman Catholic. Sally does not want him to be coerced into changing his faith. The priest states the conditions under which a Catholic may marry a non-Catholic. Because

of the haste and tension and manner of the declaration of "the conditions and requirements," the two young people are upset and arrange a marriage ceremony by a Justice of the Peace. Within a short time the young wife becomes distressed over the fact that "this was not a real marriage." She attends her church, goes through Confession and Penance and Communion, and upon the husband's promise that the children will be brought up as Roman Catholics, the priest marries them.

But the matter does not rest there. Although their marriage has many of the elements of success, the differences over religion continue to crop up and to be a source of irritation. Jim's mother cannot reconcile herself to having her grandchildren raised as Catholics; and Jim himself, though living up to his agreement, finds the arrangement increasingly distasteful.

At first Jim tries to bottle up his irritation, but this leads to unpredictable emotional upsets. He finds himself quarreling with Sally over unimportant and irrelevant matters when what he is really upset about is her insistence that the children be sent to a Catholic school — or perhaps it is the fact that the only friends who come to the house any more are Catholics. Later, under the goading of Jim's mother, the religious issue is brought out in the open as a frequent source of contention until finally the marriage itself is torn by conflict.

This marriage undoubtedly could have been a happy one, as have thousands of others between partners of different faiths, if the partners had (1) understood what they had to reckon with; (2) staked out their common ground; and (3) worked to make the marriage a success.

This particular situation has been mentioned not to dissuade anyone from a marriage outside his or her religion, but rather to illustrate some of the obstacles that must be overcome in such a union. It was not the differing beliefs that caused the trouble. They rarely do. When a couple is in love, when what they hold in common is stronger than the divergence in belief, such differences usually can be overcome. But when, as in the above case, there is pressure from

one or both of the families, the situation gets harder to deal with. If a minister or priest intervenes, it may be tangled still further. Friends or the social group also may cause trouble where husband and wife come from circles which vary sharply in views, habits, and attitudes. These are not insoluble problems, but you should consider them very carefully before marrying someone of a different denomination or religious faith. For unless you want to cut yourself off completely from your family, church, and friends, you will have to reckon with their influence as part of your future.

### **why interfaith marriages have increased**

Despite pressures from home, church, social groups, and society in general, more and more young people are taking mates of other religious affiliations. It is estimated that today one out of every five marriages unites young people of different religious beliefs and ancestries. There are a number of reasons for the increase in recent years. Among them are:

1. The increasing freedom of the individual to move about and to choose his own friends.
2. The concentration of populations in larger towns and urban communities so that the individual and the family meet many different kinds of persons, whereas in smaller and more isolated communities they met only their own kind.
3. The increased mobility of the individual through improved transportation and the increased number of contacts in neighborhood living, in industry, commerce and the professions, and in recreational and civic community activities.
4. The lessened use of the home as the center for recreational life and social contacts, and of the family circle as the setting in which the young establish their social contacts with the opposite sex.
5. The fact that within a given community there may be a scarcity of eligible and compatible young people of the same religious group or that, for a woman particularly, the only way to marry a man of improved social or economic status may be to go outside the traditional religious group.

6. The increased number of women working and earning, making it possible for them to meet more men of diverse backgrounds and to be less passive in the process of choosing a mate.

7. The lessening of discrimination and segregation in housing, education, and employment, making it possible for young people to meet and know one another in work and study and play and to break through the old patterns of separation and prejudice.

### **changing attitudes**

These changing attitudes — partly the result of changed conditions — also have contributed:

1. Educational programs have stressed respect for differences, equality of rights regardless of color, creed or national origin.

2. Religious programs have stressed interfaith cooperation and the brotherhood of man.

3. The democratic ideal of a community, enriched by the unity and cooperative relations of human beings of diverse gifts and backgrounds, appeals to young people as the only sound basis for happiness and peace.

4. The bond between young people and the religion of their birth often has been weakened by the failure of the religious organization to meet the needs of the young.

5. Although the orthodox and authoritarian of all sects oppose and try to prevent intermarriage by preaching and indoctrination and penalties, they all permit it under certain conditions. Some of the more liberal religious sects appear to have few restrictions and are quite prepared to see their young people marry members of other faiths. Their ministers are quite ready to perform the ceremony, and the churches recognize it if it is performed by civil officers or by clergy of other faiths.

For a number of reasons, then, many more young people today than ever before face the question of whether to marry or not to marry someone of a different religious faith. As free human beings, the choice is theirs to make. But as with any other choice, it is wise to consider all the facts before making a final decision.

## ARE RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES ALWAYS HAZARDOUS?

There are no national statistics to show just how the chances of an interfaith marriage compare with those of a marriage between two persons from the same religious fellowship. These facts are not available. Even if they were, you probably would not find the information very helpful as a guide to your own prospects. For every couple is different from every other. We all know that the general divorce rate today is high. But few of us would let the statistics on divorce frighten us out of marriage altogether.

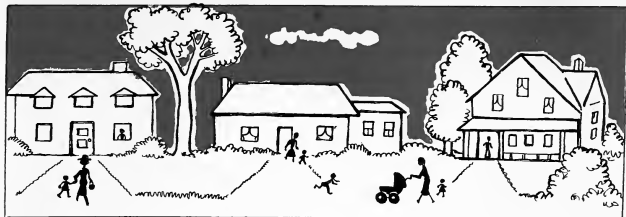
Experience, however, does provide helpful guideposts. Such studies as have been made indicate that the more similar the background, interests, and beliefs, the more likely the success of the marriage. One study, covering a fairly small sample, indicates that the rate of failure is somewhat higher in mixed marriages than in marriages between members of the same faith.

At first glance these figures seem fairly conclusive. But when examined closely, they are difficult to interpret. Is the failure of these marriages due to strong religious convictions and conflicts over religious issues? Or is it due to other factors — the adjustment of man and woman living together, different physical and emotional needs, personal habits, early training, differences of taste and values, attitudes toward decisions involving vocation, leisure time, friends, finances, relations to in-laws? Or is the failure due to external factors, the pressures of families and religious groups and the community as a whole? Is it possible that the opposition is so strong in many American communities that it affects employment or social contacts or educational opportunities till it strains the marriage bond to the breaking point?

### **religious conflict may hide real problems**

Feelings over religious differences may become intense enough to wreck a home. But usually no one factor can make or unmake a marriage. The strength of this bond depends upon a number of elements. Often the husband and wife give reasons for their marriage





difficulties which are far from the heart of their trouble. Frequently, an issue over which there is much conflict and unhappiness is merely the combat area in which hostility is expressed. The true causes usually lie far below the surface. Thus religious differences may sometimes be thought to be the reason but much deeper currents of feeling are the real cause. This may be seen in the following case:

A lawyer marries his secretary. He is of Jewish and she of Protestant background. Neither is religious in any traditional sense. Both families are unhappy about the marriage. The Christian family rejects the Jewish son-in-law and their daughter. The Jewish family resists the marriage, but they finally accept it. They attend the wedding, help the couple set up their home, and are glad to welcome their new daughter and the grandchildren as their own. As the years pass and the children grow up, the pressures for membership in a Christian church and in the Jewish temple increase. It is a suburban community and the religious and social lines are sharp. Even though the Jewish lawyer has an overwhelming majority of non-Jewish clients, the great body of these have no social relationship with him or his wife. Their chief contact with their neighbors is in the Parent-Teacher Association at the school, in the Community Chest, and in the shops. The wife resents the rejection of her children, who are attractive, gifted, and popular in school, but labeled "Jews." Neither husband nor wife is informed concerning his or her own ancestral faith. Neither knows much about the faith of the other. The religious issue is never an occasion for conflict. Both partners agree

that the children should be brought up with knowledge of the Jewish and Christian beliefs and should respect all faiths as equal.

But there are troubles in this marriage. Many acquaintances say that the troubles are due to the difference of religion, but the difficulty lies deeper. The husband comes from a family of great wealth, a family of professional people with a tradition of learning, liberalism, sophistication. The wife in this instance comes of a family of moderate means and from a fairly conservative, small-town community. She has not had much opportunity for higher education. Though she has been a good home manager, companion, and nurse, she feels inadequate intellectually. The husband has turned more and more to his practice and to his business and professional interests. As the children have reached adolescence and the independence of high school and college, the wife has felt more and more lost. Conflict has arisen.

Some will point to this family as a good example of successful mixture — while others will find here an example of the failure of religious intermarriage. In reality, the deeper questions are — why did this man, with his unusual combination of qualities, feel the need and desire to marry this girl of a background different not only religiously, but socially, financially, and culturally? Why has the community persisted in labeling and rejecting a woman of Christian ancestry as a “Jew”?

### **what are the chief obstacles?**

The chief obstacle to a successful religious intermarriage is psychological. Marriage is an adjustment. Even the most perfect marriage has its moments of difference and misunderstanding.

Religious issues also may be the occasion of conflict within a marriage of people of the same faith. Even where Roman Catholics accept the same basic doctrines, they may quarrel over the degree of religious observance, church attendance, financial contributions, parochial or public school education, and the interpretation of church policy and attitudes toward members of other faiths. So, too, Protestants of the same denomination may cross swords over

religious issues and a Jewish husband and wife may find that their common acceptance of Judaism does not necessarily mean complete agreement on religious matters.

When a man and woman are drawn to one another, select one another from among many, feel a physical attraction and a congeniality and an affection amounting to a deep hunger, there are many factors which determine whether this relation will be healthy, happy, and permanent. Common interests, some similarity in levels of intelligence, a sharing of basic values — these are more important in the long run than any particular difference on any particular day. When both partners are basically well adjusted people and love one another and share a common concern for the same values, there is a strong likelihood that they will be able to work out their problems.

Yet when this is said, it cannot be denied that a marriage concerns more than the husband and wife. The marriage involves the lives and relationships with the families and the religious communities in which the husband and wife had their origin and childhood associations. Although families, churches and communities have only an indirect influence, they can do much either to complicate and injure or to support and further the happiness of those concerned. Thus young people who contemplate a religious intermarriage should be fully aware of the pressures that may be brought on them.

## **THE ROMAN CATHOLIC POSITION**

The Roman Catholic Church today bases its position on marriage between Catholics and non-Catholics upon the practices of the early Church. Union with one who had not been baptized or who was an infidel was deemed degrading to the holy character of matrimony. The Apostle Paul held that Christian marriage was a symbol of the union between Christ and His Church. Just as the Church did everything possible to discourage unions with infidels, so it also raised impediments to unions with heretics. From the 12th century on, all marriages between Christians and infidels were null and void unless a special dispensation was obtained from ecclesiastical authority.

Although marriages with heretics were opposed, it was not until the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century that the Catholic Church declared them invalid. But during the last four centuries, the Catholic Church has found it increasingly difficult to enforce its strict decrees on this matter. More and more concessions have been made for mixed marriages but always with care to guard the essential principles upon which the Church based her objections.

The Roman Catholic Church is consistent in its philosophy and practice. It does not consider itself bigoted or prejudiced in matters of mixed marriages. As one cleric has put the matter, it merely holds that "the Roman Catholic Church is the one true Church. There is no such thing as equality of religions from the Catholic standpoint. Therefore, to have offspring reared in another faith is a catastrophe, since it denies to the persons for whom one has the greatest love the Grace of the sacraments and the solaces of Roman Catholicism in life and death. It means that one permits his children to be reared in religious error. Such words may appear harsh to non-Catholics, but Truth is objective. — No non-Catholic is compelled to marry a Catholic, but if one wishes to do so, he does it knowing very well what responsibilities such a marriage places upon him."\*

From this position, it follows, in the thinking of Roman Catholic writers and teachers that the chances of successful marriage are decreased where lines of religious faith are crossed; that a Catholic comes into serious conflict with a non-Catholic partner.

"Such differences may be glossed over and minimized in the courtship period, but they loom large in the intimate relationships of marriage. The absence of meat not only on Friday but on certain other days of abstinence may be mildly irritating to the non-Catholic party. A Catholic husband's attendance at early Mass on holy days may annoy a non-Catholic wife who therefore has to arise earlier or a non-Catholic husband who finds his Catholic wife absent from home

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\**Marriage and the Family* by John J. Kane, University of Notre Dame, The Dryden Press, 1952

at breakfast time. Holy pictures and crucifixes may appear esoteric and even unaesthetic to a Protestant or a Jew.”\*

Even more serious are such issues as whether to send children to parochial or public school, which Bible to use in the home, and what kinds of prayers, the extent of church attendance, the amount of money contributions, the practice of birth control, association with Catholic and non-Catholic friends, and the often conflicting interpretations of events in the contemporary world.

### **conditions set by the church**

From the standpoint of the Roman Catholic Church, therefore, the best and possibly the only condition under which mixed marriage can be successful is when the non-Catholic becomes converted before marriage. The next best condition would be for the non-Catholic to be converted soon after marriage. But as the Church sees it, for a Catholic and a non-Catholic to live in a permanent state of matrimony is bound to make for an unstable marriage, a hazardous environment for the spiritual welfare of children, and a questionable situation from the viewpoint of a true religious life.

The Roman Catholic Church's strong opposition to mixed marriages lies back of much preaching, educational work, penalties, the pressure for the segregation of Catholic youth in parochial schools and in Catholic youth organizations, and the general tendency to withhold its youth from involvement with programs and projects which bring young people of various religious backgrounds together in study, work, or play.

So strongly have some Catholic leaders felt on this matter that many efforts have been made to provide the opportunities to enable Catholic youth to have the utmost of social contact within the fold. Indeed, one Catholic writer has gone so far as to say that keeping company with a non-Catholic is a sin. If the Catholic is weak in faith and the non-Catholic is prejudiced and hostile and expresses his sentiments openly, then to continue courtship and plan marriage

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\**Ibid.*

is "sinful." Therefore, the individual is urged to be careful of "hazardous courtship" and is urged to tell the confessor about it in order to obtain advice and avert disaster.

### **when a priest can perform the ceremony**

Although Roman Catholic rulings and practices have varied at different periods and places in the effort to adjust to realities, there has emerged a uniform procedure which can be summarized as follows:

The marriage of a Catholic and non-Catholic can take place when performed by a Catholic priest in the presence of at least two witnesses. If performed by non-Catholic clergy, the marriage is not recognized and the Catholic party is excommunicated.

When the Catholic priest performs the marriage sacrament, the ceremony can be held in the church before the altar only if both parties are Catholics, i.e. if the non-Catholic has become a convert, or, in rare cases, if special dispensation has been granted.

If the priest performs the ceremony between a Catholic and a non-Catholic who persists in his own faith, then the marriage usually cannot take place in the church but is held in the priest's house or in the sacristy or vestry. No banns are published. No nuptial mass is held. There is no blessing of the ring. The clergy are charged to warn Catholics against such marriages and the bishops are not to grant dispensation for such unions except for weighty reason and not at the mere will of the petitioner. The conditions which are required for such a union are: (1) that the Catholic will be permitted and assured free exercise of his religion; (2) that all children born of the union, both boys and girls, will be brought up as Catholics; (3) that there will be no other form of marriage ceremony before or after; (4) that there will be obedience to the law of the Church in the prohibition of birth control and sterilization and divorce; (5) that the Catholic promises to do "all that is possible to convert the non-Catholic."

Although the obligation to fulfill the agreement is a moral rather than a legal one, neither the non-Catholic nor the Catholic could

possibly take it lightly. No marriage should begin with an act which involves dishonesty. The non-Catholic would be guilty of lack of integrity and would doubtless fall in the estimation of his partner. Insincerity on the part of either party in signing the agreement might well become the occasion for intense conflict and misery. From the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church, either insincerity at the time or violation at a later time constitutes grounds for declaring the marriage null and void.

### **pros and cons**

Those who are critical of Catholic policy urge that religious inter-marriage is bound to increase when more and more persons live in large and mixed communities with increasing mobility and communication. Consequently, this church should limit itself to persuasion and the kind of training which is consistent with respect for all human beings regardless of their creed or religious ancestry or association.

They hold that the present Roman Catholic policy casts a slur on the Catholic who marries outside the faith. They hold that the regulations violate the freedom of conscience of the non-Catholic by insisting upon a ceremony in which one partner is subject to undue pressure to violate his spiritual integrity and religious conscience. They hold that to demand a pre-nuptial pledge that children are to be brought up in the belief of one parent regardless of the belief of the other and regardless of the guarantee of religious freedom as the basic law of the land, is a violation which is unjustifiable and intolerable. They hold that such rigidity makes for religious conflict and disunity.

Roman Catholic authorities defend the requirements of their church on the ground that it has the right to make its own regulations as to the conditions under which it will perform marriages and recognize them for those within the faith. They hold that it is desirable to prevent and discourage mixed marriages as far as possible, and that it is the duty of the Church to assure that children born of marriages it has blessed be brought up in the faith.

## PROTESTANT POSITIONS

Many other religious groups have also sought to discourage marriages outside their own fold. Most say that the greatest hazard lies in marriage with a Roman Catholic. And some Protestant parents and teachers and clergy even oppose marriage with members of Protestant denominations other than their own. They point out that agreement on basic religious matters is crucial to a healthy, happy, and spiritually effective marriage. Where man and woman differ on religious beliefs and values they actually are differing on a way of life.

There are also Protestant leaders who are tolerant and ready to cross denominational and sectarian lines. But most Protestant denominations today take the position that to marry a Roman Catholic is to risk contentment and success. Several Protestant denominations have taken a strong position not so much against religious intermarriage in general but rather against mixed marriages with Roman Catholics.

### **presbyterian "confession of faith"**

For example, until 1953 the Presbyterian *Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXIV, Section III, read:

"It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry who are able with judgment to give their consent; yet it is the duty of Christians to marry in the Lord. And, therefore, such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, Papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life or maintain damnable heresies."

With this, however, the Presbyterian Church indicates that there are no "Consequences" involved for a member of the church who marries a member of another faith.

That Protestants of a number of denominations are disturbed at the consequences of mixed marriages with Roman Catholics is increasingly evident in Protestant discussions and pronouncements.



## **other denominations**

For example, in 1950 the Ministerium of Pennsylvania memorialized The United Lutheran Church in America "to formulate and declare a church policy and pastoral procedures with reference to the problem of mixed marriages."

Similarly, in 1948 the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, meeting in San Francisco, unanimously adopted a resolution patterned after that adopted by the last Lambeth Conference:

"Resolved, that this convention earnestly warns members of our Church against contracting marriages with Roman Catholics under conditions imposed by modern Roman Catholic canon law, especially as these conditions involve a promise to have their children brought up under a religious system which they cannot themselves accept; and further, because the religious education and spiritual training of their children by word and example is a paramount duty of parents and should never be neglected nor left entirely to others, we assert that in no circumstances should a member of this Church give any understanding as a condition of marriage, that the children should be brought up in the practice of another communion."

The Southern Baptist Convention and the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ adopted similar statements in 1950 and 1951 respectively.

## **no binding rules**

Despite these indications of opposition to mixed marriages and to marriages with devout Catholics in particular, the Protestant Churches generally have no regulations or rules binding their members or their clergy in regard to mixed marriages. Nor is there any legal consequence for a member who marries outside his church. The chief concern is to educate and counsel their young people concerning the difficulties they are likely to encounter in order that they may make their own decisions wisely. Parents and clergy who are more orthodox in belief and more devout in practice are likely to be more fervent in their opposition to intermarriage.

## JEWISH-CHRISTIAN INTERMARRIAGE

As with Protestantism, there is no organized, world-wide, disciplined Jewish hierarchy with authority to declare Jewish doctrine and ritual and morality, and there is a wide range of difference in belief and practice among Jews. Nevertheless, disapproval of marriages with non-Jews is fairly widespread. For the orthodox religious Jews, marriage is considered an integral part of the maintenance of the faith of Judaism: in the home the teachings of the Bible, holy days, specific dietary laws, etc., must be constantly observed. Loyalty to God, to Israel and to Torah requires marriage within the faith. And even among those who come from the liberal Jewish tradition with a minimum of emphasis on doctrine and ritual and custom, there is usually an acute reaction in the family and among friends and in the Jewish community to marriage with a non-Jew.

Just as with some Christian families, there may be intense opposition to the marriage, a refusal to attend the wedding, and even the extreme act of disinheriting and disowning the offending son or daughter. So also among Jews there may be social ostracism by friends and community. In part this is an effort to guard the religious tradition and perpetuate the faith. Even more likely is it that the Jews, no matter what the degree of religious devotion, are concerned with survival. For the religion of Judaism has been a crucial factor in the survival of the Jews.

Because of the age-old and world-wide prejudice and persecution of the Jews, the gentile who marries a Jew may find himself the target of antisemitism. Indeed, so long as antisemitism persists on this earth, the non-Jewish partner and the partially Jewish offspring may be regarded as Jews and must be prepared to develop sufficient security, strength, and faith to withstand this. It is especially important that the non-Jewish member understand the history and causes of antisemitism.

The non-Jewish partner must be prepared also for a certain amount of rejection by the Christian community and must be able to undergo this experience without becoming unduly sensitive or developing an

over-compensatory defensiveness. Both parents will have special responsibilities to assure the children of such a mixed marriage a deep security in their married and parental love. Both will have to prepare the children for an understanding of both Jewish and Christian traditions and the possibility of antisemitic prejudice. Both will have to find ways to help their children arrive at a religious outlook in which righteousness and love become the common ground which transcend and unite Jew and Christian.

Both the Jewish and the non-Jewish partners to a mixed marriage may have problems in relation to their families and friends. Both may be rejected by their own people for leaving the fold. Both may be rejected by the family they marry into. Indeed, it takes great patience and understanding and persistent devotion, to break down the prejudices and to reach the hearts and minds of those who oppose the marriage of the son or daughter to someone of another faith or religious ancestry. Both partners may find that they have to seek new friends and create a community of individuals and families in which their marriage is accepted. They may have to go beyond the narrow confines of both Christian and Jewish communities if these shut them out. In the large urban and metropolitan centers this is easier than in smaller, more homogeneous communities.

On the one hand, the orthodox and conservative groups are afraid that intermarriage will take their young people into unhappy marriages and away from their ancestral faiths into other faiths or, worse still, into apathy and neglect of the religious life. On the other, those who are liberal in religion or non-religious are often afraid that their young people will find themselves enmeshed in doctrines and loyalties which will cost them their integrity and spiritual freedom.

## **FAMILIES**

The parents of the young people usually desire their children to hold their own basic outlook and faith and to marry those of like viewpoint and raise families within the fold. When questioned concerning the marriage of their sons, one study found that 20 per



cent of the fathers approved and 80 per cent of the fathers disapproved selection of a mate from another faith. The mothers revealed the same attitudes, 19 per cent approving and 81 per cent disapproving. In the marriage of daughters, 14 per cent of the fathers approved and 86 per cent disapproved; of the mothers, 15 per cent approved and 85 per cent disapproved.

In fact, many parents find it difficult to accept and approve whatever partners their young sons and daughters choose. This is natural and human. But it may be a cause for grave unhappiness as in the following case:

The daughter in a Jewish family returns from college at the end of her freshman year and announces that she has "found her man." The young man is of Lutheran tradition. The girl's father argues that

he has no prejudice against Lutherans. He objects to so important a decision while she is only 18 years old and while she is still far from finishing her college course. He argues that she has had far too little experience for a wise choice. The father pleads with the daughter to wait, take her time, think it over. The young people elope and marry. The girl's father is distraught. He insists that he has no objection to marriage with a member of another religion or tradition; he feels bitter that his daughter made a crucial life decision on the basis of the irrational and emotional needs of the moment. Deeper than the reasons given is the fact that the young man in question has had little ambition for an education, lacks the kind of energetic and dynamic drive which might assure a successful business or professional career. The father has always pictured his daughter's marriage as a union with someone of his own intellectual and vocational and financial achievements.



To many people this is an example of the failure of marriage between Jews and Christians. To those who observe more discriminately, it is evident that the issue is not religious but concerns, first, the preferences of parents in such matters as type of personality, intellectual and cultural levels, educational and vocational and financial considerations, and second, the haste, if not defiance, with which the daughter entered the marriage.

It is understandable, too, that where young people have grown up in a generous and loving home, they should want not to hurt their parents but rather to please them and make them happy. It is important, however, that young people make their own choices and that they make their own marriage and family decisions after marriage. It is more difficult for some parents than others to learn to respect the personalities of their children and their freedom to make their own choices. And in learning to make their crucial life decisions many young people can well profit from the counsel and experience and perspective of older people. But it is hard to accept the advice of those who are close and who are emotionally involved.

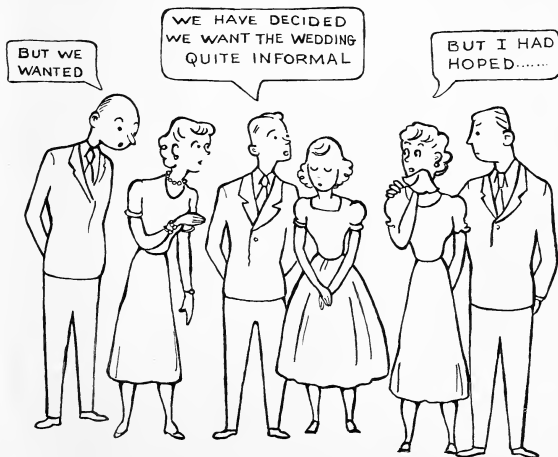
For this reason, talking one's marriage problems over with a teacher or social worker, a friend, marriage counselor, or clergyman is important. Young people are often in revolt against certain elements in their background or experience which distort their perspective. They cannot easily see the kinds of experience they may encounter in the future, even though these experiences may test their relationship to the breaking point.

Thus we have seen that the pressures of families and friends as well as of churches are often thrown against religious intermarriage. The teachings and regulations and advice before the marriage, the penalties after the marriage, and the coercion of convention and social conformity often are thrown against marrying outside of the faith of one's ancestors. Indeed, a religious intermarriage calls for an adjustment by parents and by friends which many find it hard to make successfully. The probability that their young people will achieve a happy marriage is much greater when they do make an adjustment successfully.

Where parents have kept a child close or dependent in earlier years, a mixed marriage may be hazardous unless the young person has made considerable progress in learning to stand on his own feet and is ready to make basic decisions with his mate.

Where the feelings of the parents on religion are intense and dogmatic, it is important that the young person know his own mind and take the responsibility that is his regarding his own life. In matters of religion as well as in other matters, a husband and wife should stand by one another and give one another security and backing when it comes to conflict with in-laws.

Sometimes parental domination is evident early and must be dealt with early. The marriage ceremony is not as important as the marriage itself. Yet the working out of the details concerning the wedding may be crucially important in determining the future relations with in-laws. It is the young people who are being married.





On all important matters their wishes should prevail. But compromise is justified in details and unimportant matters provided there is firmness on the important ones. But if the wedding arrangements raise a doubt concerning the son's or daughter's emancipation from parental controls, then it may be necessary to stand firm on the issues revolving around the wedding ceremony in order to lay a sound basis from the very beginning for the relations with the family.

## FRIENDS

Friends are important to the happiness of a family and a home. Every married pair wants to have some people who are congenial

and close and who form part of that cluster of families which make up their intimate circle of friends. Sometimes "friends" fall away when one enters a mixed marriage.

Both in family and friendship a mixed marriage may face special hazards in a small community or in a community which is of one religious belief. Many couples have found that they are rejected by both religious groups from which they have come, Catholic and non-Catholic, Christian and Jewish, Judeo-Christian and Eastern. In such a case, it takes strong character and a firm bond of love, as well as friendliness and a spirit of service to others, to live in a community where one is well known. It may be necessary, in fact, to move to a city in which there are large sections of liberal opinion and numbers of families who can form a community of friends and lend support to those who dare to form interreligious unions.



The answer lies within the couple themselves. And here much depends upon whether they were attracted to one another and crossed the lines of traditional religious division out of weakness and escape from their kind or whether they crossed the line because they were secure and strong and ready to reach out for broader contacts and richer living with those of different viewpoint and gifts and rhythms and religious views.

## **CHILDREN**

Children present the greatest challenge to those who enter mixed marriages. The problem is a real one. It has two major aspects which must be carefully considered by those who contemplate religious intermarriage.

First, the psychological welfare of a child, his emotional and mental health, are fundamentally dependent upon the security of the home, the strength of the marriage, and the ways in which the parents work together for the child's welfare. Religious differences need not be a problem. In fact, they may even enrich a home if they add to its security and strengthen the common spiritual values for which it stands. For it is not really the religious differences themselves but the way the husband and wife, the mother and father, see their differences that matters. Whether beliefs are the same or different, the kind of religion which means living in understanding and love helps create a climate in the home which makes for emotional and mental health. If, however, the parents are in conflict over religion, or feel guilty at having married outside their faith, the religious factor can play havoc with the welfare of the children.

Second, the religious training of the children can become ground for conflict and division. This is no simple matter unless both parents eventually embrace the same faith. It may afford little trouble if both partners agree to a broad and liberal interfaith training which might include the history of religions and stress an attitude of reverence, the worth of the individual, and the supreme importance of moral values which are common to all faiths.

Here again, the way in which man and wife approach their differences is all important. If there is confidence and trust in one another; if there is a desire to work the problem out together; if there is clarity on those values which come first, then whatever the religious backgrounds, the religious education of the children can be worked out without becoming a source of unhappiness. There may be only one church in the community. There may be no church or religious group at all with a program suitable to meet the needs of the children as this man and wife conceive them. Whatever the difficulties, the married pair can work them out only if they themselves are sound in their marriage relationship. And they will find the task much easier if they have a common ground in belief and practices and have developed their own family rituals to bind them more closely together.

When a marriage is childless and the couple desire children through adoption, great care has to be exercised in approaching adoption agencies. In many communities children are available for foster care and adoption only if the children are placed with families of the same religion as that of the natural mother of the child. Where the law requires this, or where the practice of child placement agencies is sectarian placement, the couple of mixed religious background find it extremely difficult to obtain a child. Fortunately a few agencies put their chief emphasis on whether the couple are happily married, love children, have a good home, and would make excellent parents.

## **HOW IT ADDS UP**

The religious factor in marriage is only one among many. Misunderstanding and conflict between man and wife is not limited by any means to the religious factor where the partners are of different traditions and beliefs. Even within the same faith, whether it be a Catholic, a Protestant or a Jewish marriage, the relationships may vary from happiness through to a merely tolerable marriage and finally even to great unhappiness and possibly separation.

Differences in religious affiliation and belief may or may not affect the happiness of a marriage. As with other differences, much depends on how important they are in the minds of the married pair. Where these interests are not very strong or where the couple are united in a basic religious outlook or where their love is stronger than traditional loyalties, then differences in belief or affiliation need not cause serious difficulty.

Religious intermarriage can be a mistake if the sectarian aspects of religious beliefs of the husband and wife are stronger than their love. These forces can pull that love apart.

If one member is devoutly religious and the other is weak in religious interest or non-religious, and if the devout member holds a strongly dogmatic faith, it is difficult to see how the marriage can avoid conflict. Even if the non-religious person is willing to yield on all matters, it is difficult to see how there can be a sound basis for growing love and unity. For one partner would be trying to bring the other to acceptance and outward conformity — that is trying to impose religion because it is so important to him. The other is accepting that imposition because it seems unimportant. Only a very strong love and many common interests could give stability to such a marriage.

If there are important religious differences, a couple should have other strong bonds to make their marriage effective and happy. There would have to be a security in one another far beyond legal obligation. There would have to be a strong bond of love, genuine concern for one another, and many common interests. Beyond these, each would have to be secure in his own faith and know the other's faith and genuinely respect it.

In such a marriage there could be no secret thought that "Thank God, I was born in my faith and not in his. Though I may say that all faiths are equal, I know in my heart of hearts that they aren't. I shall pray for him and convert him and save him despite himself." The difficulty in such a case is that the more one partner holds his own faith to be the one true faith, the less he can genuinely respect his partner's faith. And unless there is this recognition of the truth

and value in the other's faith, how can there be equality in the relation of husband and wife? Or a sound basis for the rearing and religious training of children? Indeed, not only must there be an equality of faiths, but also there must be, before marriage, a thorough discussion and meeting of minds and hearts on such matters as religious observance, dietary rules, money contributions, the religious education of children, and the role of the religious ideas of families and clergy.

Only by knowing one another thoroughly before marriage, only by testing one another's values and seeing each other's religious life as it works out in the families of both partners, can there be enough knowledge to give assurance that religious differences will not break the marriage. It may be possible to make adjustment through discussion and compromises. But it is better to know beforehand what the real difficulties are and withdraw from the marriage venture, if need be, than to enter romantically a relationship which may bring only misery and conflict in the end.

Intermarriage between young people of different religious ancestry and tradition may cause little difficulty and lead to many positive values if both parties are tolerant in religious outlook. The very fact of difference may, under these conditions, enrich their love and their family life. Such a marriage can mean enlarged horizons. It has implications for better intergroup relations and unity in the democratic community, and may even contribute indirectly toward greater international understanding.

### **value of guidance**

It is because young men and women in love see one another with emotional hungers and passions; it is because romance blurs the sight and love makes so many things seem far simpler than they are, that it is good to have help in facing the realities of marriage. All young people engaged to be married should seek guidance in their problems. Marriage is a choice made in freedom. Marriage is the beginning of a family and home in which two lives are joined to create something new and fresh and different. But the counselor

can point out difficulties, can indicate implications, can share lessons out of past experience, and so help the individual make his decisions with greater awareness of what is involved and with greater wisdom and maturity.



Difficulties can be overcome and have been overcome in many instances. Even if both partners start from different traditions and beliefs and associations, they can transcend these if their love is central and strong enough. Whether they attend separate churches or join the same religious fellowship or work out their religious life within the family without any affiliation, the important thing is the way of life the husband and wife experience day by day in the home.

Concern for one another's welfare and for the children, a sharing of common interests, a basic agreement on the importance of things — these are the strands of life which bind lives together in devotion and unity. Where love makes for such a marriage, the diverse religious backgrounds may enrich the common life. In such a marriage the issues of religious belief, church attendance, the religious training of children, the use of birth control, relations with in-laws, can fall into their proper perspective. Indeed, the very challenge of these problems and the effort to work them out together may make for a dynamic factor in the marriage itself and may bring the family and home life to an even greater richness and maturity, a deeper love, and a stronger faith.

### **WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN WE DRAW?**

It is evident that religious intermarriage presents serious problems even for those whose love and respect for each other is deep. Those who undertake such unions should therefore, seek information and counsel so that they may understand how to cope with the difficulties that may emerge and the conditions which favor or impair success in such marriages.

As part of the larger preparation for marriage, young people should have access to religious education which will help inform them concerning their ancestral faith. They should also have access to information which will enable them to know and understand the religious beliefs and practices of others.

Pre-marriage and marriage counseling by competent and unprejudiced counselors should be available to all young people. Parents should have some preparation for guiding their young sons and daughters on marriage problems. This should include special opportunity for clarifying of problems of religious intermarriage.

Only continuous increase in the communication between members of religious groups and only unceasing education for understanding and respecting differences can overcome the resistance and conflict over such intermarriage.

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